

Weigh In!

Want to test a new tool or share a tool-related testimonial, gripe, or technique? Contact us at JLCtools@hanleywood.com or 707.951.9471



EDITED BY BRUCE GREENLAW

BULLET CENTERFIRE FOAM-CUTTING SAW BLADES

As a union laborer on the trans-Alaska pipeline project, I once had to cut truckloads of rigid foam insulation with a table saw. Clouds of noxious, statically charged dust billowed from the saw, some of which inevitably ended up in my lungs. I could have reversed the saw blade to reduce the dust, but that would have produced more fumes. Cutting with a utility knife would have been too slow and tedious.

I wish I'd had Bullet Tools' new carbon-steel Centerfire 7¼-inch and 10-inch circular-saw blades (bullettools.com). They have a knife edge instead of saw teeth and are designed to make swift, factory-smooth cuts in foam panels and insulating concrete forms while eliminating 95% of the dust.

I just made a series of test cuts with both blades through 1-inch-thick Owens Corning Foamular XPS foam and 2-inch foil-faced Rmax Thermasheath-3 polyiso foam. The blades worked exactly as advertised, creating virtually no XPS dust, and just a light sprinkling of polyiso dust. They seared *continued on page 78*



Milwaukee M18 Fuel Sawzall

BY STEPHEN KLUG

According to an ad in the October 2013 issue of *JLC*, the new cordless Milwaukee M18 Fuel Sawzall reciprocating saw is the first 18-volt model to deliver true corded performance. When *JLC* asked if I'd like to field-test one, I couldn't resist.

I've been a hands-on contractor since 1980, and my company is currently doing lots of residential remodels and additions. Our go-to recip has been the 10-pound, 15-amp corded Makita model JR3070CT, which pumps out up to 2,800 strokes per minute with a 1¼-inch stroke length. The Makita has an aggressive orbital cutting mode, electronic speed control for maintaining constant speed under load, a clutch that helps prevent gear damage if the blade jams, and a counterbalance to reduce vibration. My crew and I were anxious to see if the new M18 Fuel Sawzall could stand in for our tried-and-true corded Makita with no significant drawbacks.

FEATURES

The M18 Fuel is the first cordless recip with a brushless motor. Brushless motors are more compact, efficient, and durable than standard motors with brushes. The tool has the same gear design, gear-protecting clutch, and vibration-damping counter-

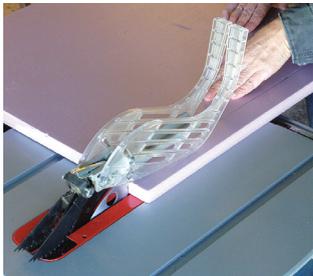
balance as Milwaukee's corded 12-amp model 6519-31. Advanced electronics maintain constant speed under load while protecting against overloading, overheating, and overdischarging.

The saw also has a lever-action blade clamp for speedy swap-outs, and a quick-release adjustable shoe that makes it easy to control the maximum cutting depth or to use a fresh series of teeth to extend the life of the blade. Much-appreciated finishing touches include a pivoting hang hook and a bright LED headlight with a 10-second after-glow when you release the trigger.

POWERING UP

According to Milwaukee, the M18 Fuel cuts up to 30% faster than competing cordless recips, and can even outpace its own corded model 6519-31 in some applications despite having a similar transmission and the same stroke specs. Unlike the M18 Fuel, the 6519-31 doesn't have electronic speed control.

As for battery runtime, Milwaukee says repetitive internal tests revealed that the M18 Fuel armed with a 6-inch Milwaukee AX demolition blade can consistently make up to 40 crosscuts per *continued on page 78*



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some of the foam edges slightly, but didn't overheat.

The 7¼-inch blade has a diamond knockout so it can fit wormdrive or sidewinder saws. I used a wormdrive because the manufacturer warns that sidewinders can bog down when cutting foam more than an inch thick. I installed the 10-inch blade in a portable table saw equipped with a riving knife, a blade guard, and anti-kickback pawls. I made most cuts freehand, as suggested by the manufacturer, but when I did use the fence, the foam would sometimes bind against it. To solve that, Bullet now includes with every 10-inch blade a "SpeedSpacer," an adhesive-backed plastic strip that sticks to the side of the fence to prevent binding.

The 7¼-inch Centerfire blade costs \$60, the 10-inch costs \$90. According to the manufacturer, the blades will cut about 25,000 linear feet of 2-inch foam before they need to be resharpened. For a modest fee (plus shipping), Bullet Tools will handle the tuneups. —Bruce Greenlaw is a contributing editor to JLC.

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charge in 2x12 pressure-treated pine when using the optimal feed pressure.

We're too busy to conduct our own speed and runtime tests, but we've pushed the M18 Fuel hard for five months—cutting everything from existing framing to ½-inch rebar—and it's in a league of its own. We thought we would miss the orbital cutting mode, but we don't. The saw speeds through our cuts like a corded tool and has yet to stall or to shut itself off to prevent overloading. The 4-amp-hour battery has had ample runtime to complete each of our cutting jobs, and its built-in fuel gauge tells us when it's time to recharge. This is helpful given that it's not a quick charge—in one timed trial, it took us one hour and 26 minutes to fully recharge the high-capacity battery.

The saw weighs about a pound less than our corded recip, is comfortable to grip, and does a good job of taming vibrations.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Since we started testing the M18 Fuel Sawzall, our corded recip hasn't left the truck. The new cordless is surprisingly fast and

powerful, delivers impressive runtime, and has every recip feature available. The cordless convenience is fabulous.

The bare tool (model 2720-20) costs \$200, or the same price as our deluxe corded recip. That's great if you've already bought into Milwaukee's M18 platform and are using the 4-amp-hour batteries. I haven't, so I'd opt for the full 2720-22 kit, which doubles the price. That's pretty steep, but I think the payback is worth it. A third option is the \$300 2720-21 kit, which has one battery instead of two.

2720-22 SPECS

Motor type: brushless

Weight with battery: 8.9 pounds

Stroke length: 1 1/8 inches

Strokes per minute: 0 to 3,000

Price: \$400

Included in kit: two 4-Ah batteries,

charger, blade, plastic case

Warranty: 5 years tool, 3 years battery

Milwaukee / 800.729.3878 /
milwaukeetool.com

Stephen Klug owns Fine Building & Finish, in Yarmouthport, Mass.



(1) The 2720 Sawzall includes a pivoting hook so you can hang it from framing, ladders, and scaffolding. **(2)** Thanks to its abundant power, long runtime, and cordless convenience, the M18 Fuel quickly became the author's go-to recip saw.

Photo: bottom right, Rob Boland



Senco Autofeed Drywall Screw Gun

BY JOSH OVERLIN

Seven years ago, I replaced our standard corded drywall screw guns with Senco autofeed guns, which drove plastic-collated screws that come 50 to a strip. Collated screws cost almost twice as much as bulk screws, but I figured that the labor savings would more than compensate.

GROWING PAINS

First my crew and I tried Senco's 18-volt model DS275-18V. We appreciated the cordless freedom, but the tool generated only 3,000 rpm and started stair-stepping screws as its nickel-cadmium batteries drained. It could sink high screws and back out misplaced ones, but you had to remove the screw strip first. We normally used a separate screwdriver instead. Also, the tool lacked an inline grip, and it needed a firm push to drive each screw, which was tiring. The spring-loaded depth gauge would sometimes stick, requiring us to manually retract it.

We replaced the cordless model with Senco's corded autofeed model DS200-AC. It was slightly faster and eliminated the stair-stepping, but it had all the other drawbacks of the cordless version. Still, it was much faster than hand-feeding screws, so we stuck with it until late 2011.

That's when we started field-testing two 18-volt Hilti SD 4500-A18 drywall screw guns equipped with Hilti SMD 50 autofeed magazines for *JLC*. We reported on their stellar performance in the April 2012 and May 2013 *Toolbox* columns and continue to run both of them hard.

For the past year, though, we've been intermittently field-testing the new 18-volt Senco DS215-18V autofeed screw gun. It's powered by a 1.5-amp-hour lithium-ion battery, which has eliminated the stair-stepping of the older cordless Senco while increasing the runtime. By our count, it drives up to about 500 1¼-inch screws per charge. The new depth gauge is easy to adjust, locks securely at the desired setting, and has yet to stick after we drive a screw. We also like the new reversible belt hook.

THE VERDICT

If we were starting from scratch, would we buy the new cordless Senco? If we turned the calendar back three years, the answer would be yes. It's better than our old Sencos. But we're spoiled by the cordless autofeed Hilti, which almost always drives screws to the right depth even if we're holding it with one hand. We can also quickly pull off

the magazine and use the tool as a conventional screw gun, which comes in handy. The new Senco still lacks a classic inline grip and now spins at a blazing top speed of 5,000 rpm, which might explain why we often have to hold it with two hands and push hard to fully sink a screw. That's especially troublesome when we're reaching to drive screws or holding up our material with one hand while fastening it with the other. As with our old Sencos, we use a separate screwdriver to sink high screws or remove errant ones. Even at \$540 for the full kit, we'd buy the Hilti instead.

DS215-18V SPECS

Weight with battery: 4.9 pounds

Rpm: 0 to 5,000

Collated screw length: 1 to 2 inches

Price: \$260

Included in kit: two batteries, charger, drywall and wood nosepieces, two drive bits, nylon bag

Warranty: 1 year

Senco / 800.543.4596 / senco.com

Josh Overlin owns Chetco Drywall, in Brookings, Ore.